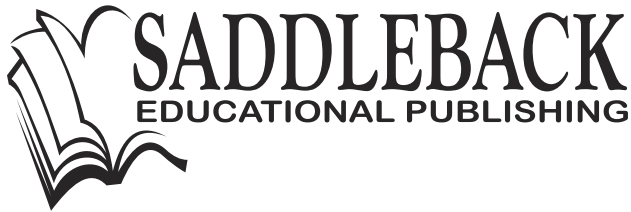


Focus **ON READING**

Maniac Magee

MEG PREO

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ISBN-1-59905-114-1
Printed in the United States of America
10 09 08 07 06 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction/Classroom Management

WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

Focus on Reading is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains a before-reading **Focus Your Reading** page containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

USING *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference page for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

Vocabulary Words to Know lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

Things to Know identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

Questions to Think About helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Focus on Reading is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or

other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives the adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary and Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice and Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

Deepen Your Understanding is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

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Focus on the Book

Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Jeffrey Magee runs away from a loveless home and winds up in the racially divided town of Two Mills, Pennsylvania. The East End is for black families only, and the West End for white families. Jeffrey can run faster than any other kid, isn't afraid to knock on old man Finsterwald's door, scores forty-nine touchdowns playing with the high-school team, and he hits the world's first-ever "frogball" for a home run bunt.

Jeffrey soon earns the nickname Maniac, and a legend is born. Maniac is uninterested in fame, however; he wants a home more than anything else. Homeless and longing for an address to call his own, he lives for a brief time with friends in the East End, the West End, and at the park's band shell. He can't understand why the East End and the West End kids won't mix with each other, and soon his biggest challenge and most memorable feat will be bringing them together.

About the Author

As a young boy, Jerry Spinelli dreamed of one day playing for the New York Yankees. But an incident in high school changed his career path. The football team won an exciting victory against one of the best teams in the country. Spinelli chose to celebrate by going home after the game and writing a poem called "Goal to Go." A few days later it was published in the local newspaper's sports pages. It was then that he traded in his baseball bat for a writer's pencil.

Jerry Spinelli graduated from Gettysburg College with an English degree and became a magazine editor. After trying to write adult novels, he realized that publishers preferred his children's work. Spinelli often uses his own childhood for research. He says, "The first fifteen years of my life turned out to be one big research

project. I thought I was simply growing up in Norristown, Pennsylvania; looking back I now realize that I was also gathering material that would one day find its way into my books."

Spinelli lives with his wife, Ellen, a fellow writer, in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Their six children have provided a lot of inspiration for Spinelli's many books for young readers. *Maniac Magee* is a winner of the Newbery Medal for excellence in children's literature.

Historical Background

The setting of *Maniac Magee* is a fictitious town called Two Mills, Pennsylvania. The book deals with the themes of racial prejudice and homelessness.

Despite many advances in civil rights laws to ensure equal rights for all people, there are still some cities and towns in the United States that remain racially divided. Sometimes people of another color are discriminated against and are not given equal opportunities for schooling, housing, or careers.

Even though the United States is the richest nation in the world, there are still many people in the United States who are homeless, including many children like Maniac Magee. Sometimes children are homeless because they run away, like Maniac does, and sometimes they are homeless because of their family situation. Maniac is lucky to find other families to move in with, but this is rarely the case with runaway children. Maniac decides to no longer attend school, but most states have laws that require schooling until a minimum age of about sixteen. Also, most states have agencies that try to offer aid to the homeless, providing shelter and food. Some runaway children are reunited with their families. Others find homes through the foster care system or are legally adopted.

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Focus Your Knowledge

- What does the word *prejudice* mean to you? Have you ever been prejudiced against someone else? Why? Has someone else been prejudiced against you? How did this make you feel? In your school or community, what are some things that you can do to help stop prejudice?
- Research the number of homeless people in the United States. Do the figures show the number that are children? How do the numbers in your state compare with other areas in the United States? Do the numbers indicate that this is a growing problem?
- Research the agencies in your community that could provide assistance to a homeless child like Maniac, or to a homeless adult. What do you think are the major reasons for homelessness? Use some magazine or newspaper articles to find up-to-date information about your area. What are some ways people—including students your age—can help with this problem in your community?
- Baseball is one of the many things Maniac is good at. Willie Mays was one of the greatest professional baseball players in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. He was also African American. In the early history of baseball, black players were not allowed on professional teams. Research the history of baseball, and find out when this policy changed.

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Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

accurate—free from mistakes

suspicious—not trusting

hauling—pulling with great effort

vanished—gone from sight or existence

commotion—noisy excitement and confusion

emanation—emission; something that comes out from a source

flinched—drawn back as in pain

flared—spread outward

lumbered—moved in an awkward, heavy way

fascinated—powerfully attracted to something

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

A **legend** is a popular story that may not be completely true.

A **legacy** is something received from the past.

A **trolley** is a streetcar electrically powered from overhead wires.

The **Schuylkill River** is a river in Pennsylvania that flows by the city of Philadelphia.

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A **Samaritan** is a person that helps strangers in distress.

A **punt** in football is a ball kicked by the top of the foot before the ball, dropped from the hands, hits the ground.

A **bunt** in baseball occurs when the batter taps the ball without swinging the bat.

A **four-bagger** in baseball is another name for a home run.

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. Why did Jeffrey run away from his family?
2. How does Jeffrey deal with being homeless?
3. What is the significance of Two Mills being divided into an East and a West End?
4. Why does Maniac's physical appearance bother Amanda and the others?
5. How does Maniac become a legend in Two Mills?

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Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “Of course, to be **accurate**, he wasn’t really Maniac then. He was Jeffrey. Jeffrey Lionel Magee.”
accurate: _____
2. “Amanda was **suspicious**. Who was this white stranger kid? And what was he doing in the East End, where almost all the kids were black?”
suspicious: _____
3. “She slammed the suitcase shut and started **hauling** it along.”
hauling: _____
4. “But the ball never quite reached Hands. Just as he was about to cradle it in his big brown loving mitts, it **vanished**.”
vanished: _____
5. “Later on that first day, there was a **commotion** in the West End.”
commotion: _____
6. “Another swears it was a mirage, some sort of hallucination, possibly caused by evil **emanations** surrounding 803 Oriole Street.”
emanations: _____
7. “[The ball] was in the air, riding on a beeline right out to McNab’s head, the same line it came in on, only faster. McNab froze, then **flinched**, just in time.”
flinched: _____
8. “His nostrils **flared**, he was breathing like a picadored [speared] bull.”
flared: _____
9. “He **lumbered** off the mound after the frog, which was now hopping down the third-base line.”
lumbered: _____
10. “Ordinarily, he would have returned it sooner, but he was so **fascinated** by the story of the Children’s Crusade that he kept it and read it the next day. And the next.”
fascinated: _____

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Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- Where was Maniac born?
 - in a dump
 - in Two Mills
 - in Bridgeport
- Who is the first person Maniac really meets in Two Mills?
 - Hands Down
 - Amanda Beale
 - John McNab
- What does Amanda Beale carry to school in a suitcase?
 - her homework
 - her gym clothes
 - her library of books
- What causes a commotion at Finsterwald's home?
 - John McNab hits a baseball over the fence.
 - Maniac is surprised for dinner.
 - Arnold Jones gets dumped in the backyard.
- What are finsterwallies?
 - violent trembling of the arms and legs
 - loud screams
 - fast balls thrown by John McNab
- At whose home does Maniac get a spaghetti dinner?
 - at the Beales'
 - at the Pickwells'
 - at the McNabs'
- Where do the black families live in Two Mills?
 - in the West End
 - in Bridgeport
 - in the East End
- How does Maniac surprise everyone at the Little League field?
 - He shows up wearing a Red Sox uniform.
 - He strikes out John McNab.
 - He hits a frogball for a home run.
- What does Amanda lend to Maniac?
 - the A book of the encyclopedia
 - the story of the Children's Crusade
 - her bus pass
- Where does Maniac call home at this time?
 - the Pickwells'
 - the deer shed at the zoo
 - Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan's home

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Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. Why did Jeffrey run away from Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan?
2. What does Maniac have in common with Amanda Beale?
3. How does Maniac impress the high school football players?
4. Why does Amanda tell Maniac not to return the book to her house?
5. What are two amazing things that Maniac does at Finsterwald's house?
6. How does Maniac get a free spaghetti dinner in Two Mills?
7. What does John McNab look like?
8. What makes John McNab famous in Two Mills?
9. What are three reasons why Jeffrey gets the nickname Maniac?
10. Where does Maniac spend his first few nights in town, and how does he spend his time?

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Deepen Your Understanding

The setting of the story is the time and place the action happens. Based on what you have read so far, describe the town of Two Mills and some of the places that Maniac visited. Do you think this story could be set in your town, in this year? Explain.

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